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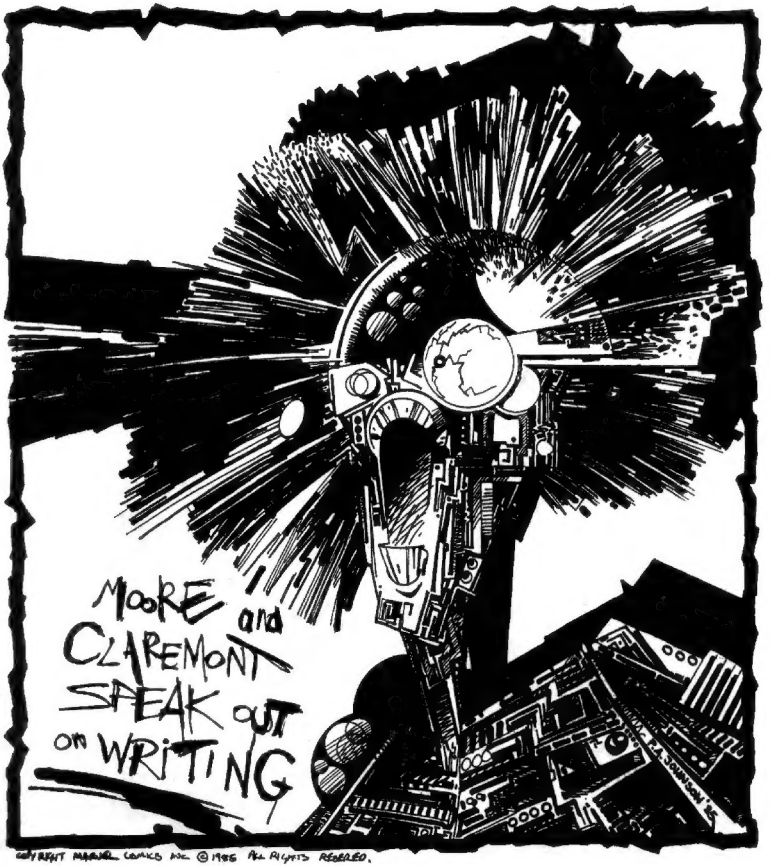

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MOORE and CLAREMONT SPEAK OUT on WRITING

During the recent visit of the X-Men creative team to the UK, your intrepid reporters from Speakeasy cornered Chris Claremont after his mammoth signing session in Forbidden Planet for an exclusive interview. However, just as he was about to be whisked away in our bullet-proof limousine a familiar, if somewhat sinister figure lurched into view. It was none other than Alan Moore, who had just heard on the phone from the US that he had been voted Second Best Comics Writer in the Comic Buyer's Guide poll. As we rushed to offer our heartiest congratulations, he graciously broke the news to Chris Claremont that he had in fact been voted the First Best Comics Writer in the selfsame poll. Not believing our luck, we also bundled Mr Moore into the back of the limo, took the official Two World's Greatest Comic Book Writers to an exclusive eaterie, and pointed a tape recorder in their general direction. What follows is our transcript of this momentous historic occasion...

WOULD YOU AGREE THAT THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR STORIES IN THE X-MEN, CHRIS, ARE SIMILAR IN FORM TO A SOAP OPERA?

CC: What you are talking about is the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. What is a soap opera? It's all about people who are in extreme emotional distress, how they deal with it, how they resolve it, how the resolutions vary, how it can lead to even greater crises. If you look back over the issues that Len (Wein) and Berni (Wrightson) did of Swamp Thing, in a sense it defines the original concept and the issues, at least as I see it, that Alan and John (Totleben) and Steve (Bissette) have developed. It all revolves around the relationships between Alec Holland, Matt Cable, Abby Arcane. The stories at their best revolve around the weaknesses of the characters. It's soap opera in the sense that that is soap opera. You only call it soap opera because soap companies sponsored it. We're talking about an ongoing dramatic form that tugs the heart strings.

WITH THE X-MEN YOU HAVE A LARGE POOL OF CHARACTERS SPREAD OVER TWO REGULAR MONTHLY TITLES, AS WELL AS ANY NUMBER OF MINI-SERIES AND SPECIALS. HOW DO YOU WORK IN TERMS OF PLOT? DO YOU HAVE EVERYTHING WORKED OUT TWO YEARS IN ADVANCE, OR DO YOU MAKE IT UP AS YOU GO ALONG?

CC: Len Wein used to plot stuff out two years in advance, and at its worst it was deliberate. By the time you get to the end of two years it's all very sterile. What I generally try and do is to ground a specific story in an image, a characterisation story or the structural plotting. The best stories will be grounded in characterisation, the Wolverine mini-series for example. I try and plot things out at least six to eight months in advance or at least one month in advance, or at least rough things in. But I also do what I call the Juggling Factor. I'll throw stuff up in the air with no conscious idea where I want go with it. Subconscious things yes, but consciously I'm hedging my bets. I've got all these things scattered across the ceiling that some day may or may not fall, but mostly they're always there for me to pick up on at a later date. Once I was stuck for a story; I walked into Louise (Simonson)'s office and said " I don't know what to do next month. I'm dry. I'm out of ideas." So she made me list all the outstanding questions that I hadn't answered, and by the time we were done we had about six issues worth of stuff. With twenty or thirty main characters there are so many levels to the characters that are not yet plumbed. I could do a story just by interacting the eight characters who are the X-Men, bumping them together, and out of the way they grate or not come up with a story, which is actually how it should be. Because it's grounded in emotion and not always on a villain. For me the most difficult and tedious stories are the Arcade stories, because there is no depth to Arcade. He is what he is: psychotic, crazy, loony, whatever, so the stories become exercises in technique. What nifty way can we get them captured, what nifty gimmicks can he come up with, how can they escape? It's very nice but it's very boring ultimately, because there's no depth, there's no wrinkles to it. It's fine every so often as an antidote to the meaningful crap, but I wouldn't want to do it regularly. That's ultimately why the Spider-Man Team-Up lost its glow for me, because it was mostly just technical.

AM: Getting back to what you were saying about the soap opera, basically I agree with Chris: it's just semantics. It's what you choose to define as soap opera. But I think that why the X-Men and the New Mutants might perhaps to a lot of people invite the label soap opera more than Swamp Thing is purely because of the number of characters. With Swamp Thing we've got two main characters really: it's not the same, you've got a different structure. Chris has got sixteen, so you do get a sense of a broad tapestry which is one of the things that soap opera is.

CC: Also with Swamp Thing as with Daredevil, which is its closest parallel, I think, because it's a solo character, therefore it's a very intense concentration. I could devote twice the concentration to the X-Men but because it's been spread among eight characters it's diffused. Moreover because of the structural dynamics of the medium, having a group for heroes requires invariably that you have a group for villains,

because otherwise the subconscious sympathies of the audience are with the villains, which you shouldn't have. Which therefore means that you are dealing with anywhere up to a dozen to two dozen characters in any given story, which means that you have to spend a third or a half the book introducing everybody, which is why you have two or three issue stories. But again that diffuses it even more because you want to make the villains at least as interesting as the heroes.

AM: I have just started writing the first book that I have ever done that could be remotely construed as a superhero team book. It's got a number of different super heroes in it...

CC: The Charlton stuff?

AM: The Watchmen.

CC: What was the Charlton stuff?

AM: That's right. But I am glad that we didn't get the Charlton stuff now because the characters we have come up with are better. With that I found it's coming out like Thomas Pynchon in comics, it's so bloody dense. We've got twenty eight pages in there and Dave's working on a nine panel frame grid, so I've found it quite easy to set it up so that you can get all the characters in there. And also I haven't got Chris's problem in that I have just got to do twelve issues. I don't think that you see a supervillain throughout the entire twelve issues, so it's avoiding a lot of the classic hero/villain formula.

CC: The X-Men Ethiopia book is a nice case in point. Most of the first third of it is basically single character sequences: each of the X-Men as individuals goes through a significant trauma. It isn't until the end that they start acting as a group. In Alan's case he had Magneto. It took me the better part of a month to choreograph it, just because you have to keep track of where everybody's going and what everbody is doing. And depending on how on the ball your artist is, you have to be thinking characterisationally for all six, eight, ten, twelve characters, in terms of how they dress, how they look, what their rooms are like. There are times that you pray someone will come along and do exactly what Jim Shooter says you should do, which is establish properly and completely and in a style that is boring but as clinically clear as Curt Swan, what each character's room is like, so you don't have to spend two pages describing it. Frank (Miller) went to incredible dimension in describing Daredevil's house: that it's physical, that it's sensual, that it's all statuary, and in a sense I'm extrapolating that with Rogue because in her case her room is all wood and rawstone. It's things to touch because she can't touch a person, a dog, a cat - nothing. Anything that's alive, that has a consciousness - she's doomed if she touches it. So she's like the boy in a plastic bubble. I see her in the privacy of her room with the most physical things, woollens, silks: just the texture of things - not even clothes so much as just as hanging pieces. These are things that you almost never get a chance to establish in a book because you've got to run helter skelter through it, but you need to so the reader will look at it and think. One of the things that was so impressive about Alan's Magneto scene was the description of the office, and he lists the three books that Magneto has in the world: Nietzsche's Man and Superman, the other's a book on advnaced physics, and the third was Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow. I thought this is great! Not only is he brilliant and an egotist, but he has a sense of humour.

HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

AM: It was just the spines of the books.

CC: Actually Pynchon's the only one that made it onto the panel.

AM: Not to worry. All that stuff is just detail so that other people can get into it. I agree that the establishment of invisible character detail, the stuff that is not on the surface, the stuff that is just sublimimal - context - is an important thing. With Watchmen we tried to really go in for that. It's an extension of the technique that I used in Halo Jones, probably a lot different to the clear establishing that Chris was talking about, in that it's an extension of the idea of teaching parallel languages by dumping people in a room full of foreigners. Okay, the first time it's going to be hell and the first time it's going to be incomprehensible, but eventually your understanding of that world will be much more thorough. It's a long shot, but I think it's going to work because we have got a lot of space: we're working on nine panels of page as opposed to the normal six. That gives you half the book again and you've got twenty eight pages so, in effect you're doing a forty two page book or something, which gives you a lot of information. It's not a very big story either. It's a story that I could probably have told in three issues, but were telling it in twelve. It's not going to be padded, it's just that having twelve we've got room to explore all the characters.

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THE DETAIL A WRITER OR ARTIST CAN PUT IN OR NOT PUT IN...

CC: That is what Steven King does to incredible effect. He creates such a specific real American consciousness in his book, an environment. The supermarkets he describes are supermarkets we all know. Because all of the accoutrements of their lives are the accoutrements of our lives, we relate to them. They achieve a texture and a reality that makes what happens to them more powerful. I think that Dickens to a large extent did the same thing. With us though the thing that I always have to remember, and the thing that I always tell kids who are trying to break in, and the thing that you sometimes can't do no matter how hard you try, is it's a visual medium. It should be in the picture. What I should be talking about, if I am, are the things that the reader can't see, which are states of mind or attitudes. You should know the parameter's of Wolverine's life by how he's staged in the panel, by how he appears, by how he stands, by how his room looks. What it requires is that the artist be as focused and be as much of a collaborator and a contributor as the writer, that they think as hard as the writer. That's why to an extent I don't think that any writer could do a book like American Flagg! or Daredevil because Frank and Howard (Chaykin) could communicate so completely as the writer/artist. I mean there's no way I think that two people could come up with American Flagg! the way Howard did it. Alan's done back ups in it, and I notice that the texture isn't there. It's close - I felt that the Kansas story was great - but with Howard everything little thing that is on that page is specific and is integral to the understanding of the story, because it's the world you have to understand.

AM: This comes down to one of the big differences between me and Chris, beyond any stylistic differences. It's purely in the way we work, in that Chris writes plots and then writes the dialogue, and I write a full script. I know that Chris has said he would find it very difficult to write a full script...

CC: Just because I'm a lazy sod!

AM: The only difference is that I wouldn't like to do it your way you know because of the amount of control. I write very, very full scripts. For the first episode of The Watchmen, the manuscript was 164, pages but that meant in each panel you've got a lengthy description and I'm describing everything in the panel. There's a scene where a character goes home and finds Rawshack, one of the other characters, waiting for him in his kitchen. It's a conversation and I knew how the character who found Rawshack there would be reacting, but I needed something for Rawshack to do. It's not a big thing, but while he's talking to the other guy Rawshack goes into the kitchen, goes over to the work surface, takes a sugar jar. He's just carrying on talking and in three panels you see him unscrewing the top of the sugar jar, then he just tips out all the sugar cubes while he's still talking to the other guy, and scrapes them all into the pocket of his raincoat, and then just carries on talking. There is no more mention of the sugar cubes until about two scenes later, you're in another character's house and Rawshack's turned up there and while he's talking he pulls his mask up over his nose, reaches into his pocket, takes out a sugar cube, unwraps it, puts it in his mouth, pulls down the mask and just stand there going crunch crunch crunch while he's talking, and drops the paper on the floor. Four pages later you see the woman who is in the house frown, and pick up this piece of paper from the floor and dump it in the litter bin. It's an unimportant bit, but it establishes a couple of characters by a bit of business. Again with Watchmen we have to have an advert hoarding in the background. I told Dave (Gibbons) what the product is, we made up a perfume called Nostalgia and we see it on a hoarding in the first issue. In the second issue somebody's got a bottle of Nostalgia on their dressing table and that is the sort of depth and complexity that I find it easy to get doing a full script, which is one of the reasons I wouldn't be at home with a plot. It's a similar thing to what Chris is saying. It's a matter of control, making sure that everything is there for a reason. Nothing that is just "Oh well...". You think what sort of clothes is he wearing - "well it might be this, it might be that, it doesn't matter." If you know the character well enough you know what sort of clothes he is wearing.

CC: The conscious decision I made was to sacrifice a measure of that control for the advantage of the artist's contributory creativity. I find when I am working with someone like Frank (Miller) or Walt Simonson or (John) Byrne or Paul Smith or John Bolton, to name just a few, that there is a barrier: their suggestions, their thoughts of pacing. They know better how to visually construct a scene than I do; I know how I want the beginning, the middle and the end to go, but how we get there is mutable. In the Ethiopia book, with each scene the beginning and the end had to be specific because it was carried over to another scene but the middle was mutable. My concept of Alan's scene, oddly enough, was that the climb to the hill was a joyous occasion, it was Moses leading the chosen people into Jordan, it was happy. Seeing Alan's, it worked just as well. With John (Bolton) on the Black Dragon, he knows how the story goes - I structure that page by page, but he provides the internal dynamics. I want to see what his thoughts are, I want this to be as much his work as mine. It's sacrificing a measure of control to hopefully gain a measure of creativity. The down side is that you end up sometimes having to write obscenely huge blocks of copy to cover screw ups.

AM: My attitude is the same as Chris's. I value serendipity, and I value the artists input a lot and with every script I have written, I write a full script and than say "Throw it out". That's all that they need, if you say that "Here's my full script; this is everything that I can think of that would look good in here. If you've got a better idea or if one of my ideas is bad and you think that you can do it better, then change it"; which means that all I am doing really is giving them something they can use as a jumping off point. With the Magneto sequence, at the beginning Magneto is looking at his reflection in the Cerebro helmet, and in the last panel you have a corpse looking at their reflection in the old Magneto helmet. That gives the three pages a symmetry that binds it together. If I'd just worked from the plot, it would be unlikely that you would get that. That is the sort of thing that I value, the fact that you can impose a structure and then let the artist... Well, take Steve and John: they come up with some incredible weird shit. It's what I ask for - I might say "Now we want some horrible sort of war fantasy" and make a few suggestions - but they will be putting their own minds into it. I think it's the job of the writer to inspire the artist in one way or another.

CC: What it also comes down to is, in many respects, just ways of working. It's really weird: I plot on my computer or typewriter, but I can't compose a script that way; I have to do it longhand. I can't write prose longhand but I have to write script. For some reason I freeze up, the screen kind of inhibits me, I need the ability to doodle on the page. But when I write prose I cannot script fast enough, I cannot put ink on paper speedily enough to keep up with my thoughts. Going back to what Alan was saying, the problem I find with far too much stuff is that a lot of writers don't feel the need to inspire their artists. On plots and full scripts, because I have done my share, the thing that drives me crazy is when you get an artist who with all the information in the world chooses to ignore 80% of it. If you set up something that's absolutely integral in a scene and it's not there, there is very little you can do about it because of the time pressures involved, and yet it just drives you absolutely bugshit.

AM: I have never been that affected by that. I can't remember any art jobs where I would say that was a bad job. Take the recent American Flagg! jobs that Chris mentioned. When I drew them I was imagining it in Howard Chaykin's style, I was imagining it serious so that the humour would be more cutting because it was more deadpan. Larry Stroman and Don Lomax, who are both quite new artists, have been doing it in funny style which wasn't what I was expecting. So the first time I looked at it I thought "Oh no, this isn't really what I wanted". But they tried really hard; they are both young artists and yet they put everything in the panels that I asked for, and if I think that the artist has put some muscle into it I don't care what the job looks like as long as I know they have actually put their weight behind it and taken it seriously.

CC: To my mind, especially in terms of a mainstream dramatic series, given a choice between a technically brilliant artist who doesn't give a shit and somebody who is flawed but is willing to put his heart and soul into it, I'll go for the flawed every time. Sal (Buscema), for example, is technically a superb artist who for too many years for felt that a certain standard was required of him and that was it, and it wasn't working out for the New Mutants, and they switched with him Bill (Sinkiewicz). Bill's stuff on the Mutants was alive, it was crazy, it was controversial, and it catalysed all my thoughts on the characters. I need the kick to get my head to go. All the elements were in my brain, I just couldn't get them out. I wasn't conveying them to Sal in a way that he was able to give back. Paradoxically at the same time Sal has been re-evaluating his work, and the stuff that he has been doing recently on Hulk, and more especially The Eternals and the Balder mini-series is some of the finest stuff he's done, almost on a par with his brother,John. In some respects I think it's far better because he is trying much harder, he's putting stuff in there: humour, camera angles, visual characterisation. Nothing galls me more than seeing someone with tremendous potential who just sits on it because they have made a conscious or unconscious decision "This is all I need to do". That goes for writers, it goes for artists, it goes for letterers even, and colourists. Arrogantly I feel that if I am going to give everything I've got - as Reg Smith the New York Times sports columnist said when he was asked is it easy to write, "Sure, open your vein and let the blood drip on the page" - if I am going to do that, I want everybody else to do it or at least try to do it. Some people feel that's asking too much. My feeling has always been "It's my name on it". That's why I've always been an absolute prima donna about re writes: an editor has every prerogative to come to me and say "I don't like this, I want it changed", but I want to change it. I don't want anyone else putting words on my pages. I'll take the rap for my mistakes if they are my mistakes, just like I will take the cheers for my successes, and I have had many screw ups where editors have come in and changed stuff and not let me know or not given me a chance to do it and I've taken the rap for it.

AM: One of the things that is difficult with judging any comic writer is that the public is not generally aware of what's happened in the production of that comic. Someone wrote to me and said "Really like Swamp Thing, really like the writing, but I am really getting pissed of with those three little dots that you put in between every two or three words. It's stilted, artificial, ugly." But the thing was my first issue of Swamp Thing had hardly any little dots at all, and what happened was that Len (Wein) said that the way Swamp Thing should be speaking, which I suppose I would have noticed if I'd looked at it closely, is that he has these three little dots, and I had to rationalise that. In my head, it sounded like an asthmatic talking, a little burst of words and then a deep breath, but even so it's something that I could have done without.

CC: Now that he has redefined himself now that he knows more what he is, you can get rid of it because he's not trying to fake it. What he was trying to before was be a man, but now he's not - he could just find a new way to do it.

AM: It's a matter of finding a way to do it gradually, except that we have got a lot of other changes going on at the moment and so I don't want to overload it.

YOU COULD DROP ONE DOT AT A TIME...

AM: Two dots at a time, yeah that's right (laughter).

DO YOU THINK THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE WRITER IN THE COMICS FIELD IS UNDERRATED?

CC: Oh I think they are. More people come up to me, and more letters keep saying that the writing left the X-Men with John Byrne I mean The fact is, and I think any good artist worth half a damn will tell you this, that we're the ones who start the story. The artist may come in and say "I've got a brilliant idea for a story", but the writer is the one who hammers it into shape. The major flaw I used to find among artists who write was that they would come up with great individual stories, but it would not hold as a series. If you talk to people like Frank and Walter and John and Howard, who are writers, they will more often describe themselves as writers who draw as opposed to artists who write. The misconception is that our job is to put the words on the page, and it isn't. Our job is to tell the story that puts the art on the page. What we're there to do is to give the artist the framework, the images, whatever, that he or she converts into the pictures. Then we take the words to point the pictures in certain directions but it's getting the pictures on the page first that's important and that's where we earn our money. That was always the polarity in Marvel because you were paid $25 for a plot and $480 for a script, and the first thing that Shooter did was to reorient that and establish that we have a plot rate and a script rate, and the plot rate is half the script rate. In my case that's where I do 90% of my work; scripting is easy because for me anyway 90% of the work is about when I write the plot.

AM: Going back to what you were saying about an artist's considerations when it comes to write - this is not a general slur of all artists - but a lot of artists will obviously think in terms of visual considerations because they have got to sit there and draw the book, which is about five times the actual physical labour that me and Chris have put in. So they are going to think "I want something nice to draw". Just as a random example, with Captain Britain when I was working with Alan (Davis), since he has been doing the script before me, we both had lots of input into it. Alan liked the idea of drawing a lot of super hero characters. He liked the idea of bringing in the Special Executive and adding about six more members to them, and he liked the idea of having lots of characters around because it gave him new characters to design, new characters to draw. After a while I found when I was writing it - I wanted to give Alan everything he wanted - but I found that you were eventually getting a script that was swamped in characters, because once you created these characters who look good for their five panel introductory fight scene, they are still hanging around. Unless you are going to have them to just dematerialise then you have got to think of something to do with them, and the more characters you get the more difficult it becomes. I read an interview with Alan where he was saying that he got bored with some of the Captain Britain stories because Captain Britain was becoming a background character, and this is the difference between artists' thinking and writers' thinking. Writers have to think in a tapestry, they have to think "Well okay, I could do this now and it would

be really really flash and it will be really good for these three pages, but it would diffuse something I've got coming up in a month's time, something I've got coming up in two months' time, it would spoil this little relationship I've got building there: it's not worth it". You tend to think in the long term, in the overall picture, rather than in terms of what is going to be good for that week's work.

CC: The best case in point is Stan (Lee) and Jack (Kirby). Jack was no less prolific, no less creative: if you look at what he was coming up with in Fantastic Four #40 to FF #90 and Thor at the same time, every month was something completely different. What Stan did was to say "Great! We ignore this shit, this is what's important". He would focus, he would rein Jack in, and I think that was the genesis of the split: Jack got less and less. And to a large extent that was the genesis of the split between me and John on The X-Men. There comes a point in every creative team where each side has to compromise: I have to give up a little of what I want as a writer, John has to give up a little of what he wants as the artist. It was the same with Stan and Jack. The problem is when you get to the point where you feel less and less inclined to, because you think " I know these characters as well as he does. Why doesn't the other guy listen to me? Why does he get his name first? It sounds petty but it actually comes of a deep seated affection, love for the characters, a sense of your worth, a sense of the book's worth. You're doing the best you think you can, you're committing yourself passionately to this work, you want it to reflect your contribution and you don' t want to see that creation twisted in a direction that you think is wrong. At a certain point you just can't do it anymore and that's when you break up. You can see it with Jack's stuff since then: the Fourth World stuff for DC, The Eternals for Marvel, Captain Victory - every month it's something new. In The Eternals Ikarus was meant to be the hero: by the fourth issue where did he go? In The New Gods, it was supposed to be Orion, by the fifth issue it was High Father, then Himon. The only character who really stayed centre stage all the way through was Scott Free. It would have been interesting to see what would have happened if Carmine (Infantino, then DC's publisher) hadn't... That's a Comics Journal feature, that's an investigative report I'd like to see: What happened with Mr Miracle, The Fourth World - why did Carmine pull it? The thing is, without anyone to restrain him, to say "No, this is the hero, this is the guy we've got to focus on", you didn't know who the book was about. It was about too many people, and just as you got to the point where you really invested your emotions in a person they were off-stage. Again going back to The X-Men, what Dave and I did in the first 18 issues leading up to "Armeggedon Now" was we took these six characters: these are the characters, this is what it is all about. All the fights, all the Universe-saving, all this other shit was peripheral background. What it's about are these eight people and how they come together like this. And we formed a cohesive emotional bond between the characters and the audience that with #108 set up the dynamic for #137. I mean, I am writing #200, we're talking 63 issues ago Phoenix died. What's that, five years? Kids are still asking me why did they kill her, to the extent where Marvel's now bringing back Jean Grey in X-Factor, because they think it's going to be a big deal.

AM: She's dead then?

CC: She never died. She was at the bottom of Jamaica Bay since issue #100.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT?

CC: No comment. (Laughter).
It's the same sort of thing that Marv Wolfman did with Dracula. He said basically this book is about Dracula and Quincy and Rachel and Frank Drake, and he built the cast and he said "This is who it's about" - all the other shit, the adventures, it's all peripheral. Frank said the same thing with Daredevil "This is what's it's about". All the best books if you look at them are about characters. Characters are what drive the engine. The saying is that good characters will get you through days of bad stories better than good stories will get you through days of bad characters, because if the worse comes to the worse you can always fall back on the character collisions. To me what goes hand in hand with the characterisation is passion: if I'm given the choice between logic and passion in a story, nine times out of ten logic goes out the window. Because I want the passion, I want the reader to read something and get to the end of the twenty two pages, and if the story calls for it I want them to be moved. I want a reaction, I dont care if it's positive or negative - it ought to be positive but I want a reaction. I don't want them to say "That's nice" and throw it away.

AM: I agree with that. I like to brutalise the readers emotionally as much as possible, because so much culture is deadening, so much culture has no emotional impact. Culture is more to do with avoiding emotional impact - muzak culture, where all of the emotional high peaks have been edited out. If I was going to do anything in comics, I would like to think that I was going to do something that was going to upset people in one way or another.

CC: Make them think. A friend of mine in Michigan sent me the xeroxes of Alan's run on Captain Britain. I read it in one sitting, and I said to myself "Shit, I created this little book?" It bore no resemblance, but what was flattering was that Alan built on the stuff that I set up. He did what Frank did with Daredevil, he did what every good writer should do which is go back and look at what's there and find a way to build on it. Walter did it beautifully on Thor. He didn't agree with anything that had gone before, but he gave the reader an out, he debunked it but in such a way that if you want to believe the story that Roy (Thomas) and Mark Gruenwald and Ralph Macchio did was the way it was, you can. That's how it should be - you should never foreclose an option.

AM: With the Captain Britain stuff, when I read it through - I mean, after you left the book there was there was an awful lot of, I mean really...

CC: Well, when I was on the book it wasn't all that great.

AM: You were limited to start with because you had got a cross between Spider-Man and Captain America in Britain, but when I went through it I felt that my job is to accept that all this is real on some level, and that all this happened - much as I wish most of it hadn't - and try and come up with some overstructure that will accommodate all that, while emphasising the better elements.

CC: When I got to the end my first reaction was "

Wow!" this is like a great roller coaster ride, this is neat! I am reading Jamie (Delano)'s stuff now and it's really neat I like it and I want to see what happens next. In a sense that's the other great rule, you want to get a continuous art form, a serial. The whole objective of every issue is when you get to the last page that the kid wants to see what happens next, and if the reader doesn't have that reaction then you've failed. You can't take the reader for granted, you have to work for their respect and once you've gained it you can't lose it. To me, the way to do it is through the emotional context: I was caring about Brian and Betsy and, Christ!, even Saturnyne and the Crazy Gang I felt so bad when they all got chewed up. And when this little tadpole got himself incinerated right off the bat. Actually, I felt sorry for the Fury - aww, poor little unstoppable killing machine!

AM: What can you do if you're an unstoppable killing machine? You're not going to have many options, are you?

CC: But it was challenging, it was exciting. Ronin was, almost. Eisner, if you want to go back to basics.

AM: Love and Rockets - good emotional character stuff there.

CC: And a woman who is getting fat.

AM: That's good

CC: The reason I love Love and Rockets is because Maggie is getting fat. I am doing it with a boy: Sunspot is becoming a chocoholic, he's going to gain weight, but that's a boy. Boys's get fat. Karma got fat, but it was a joke.

AM: It's not taboo to have an ugly boy in comics. It's not taboo to have a less than physically perfect boy. To have an ugly girl that is sympathetic is a move that I'm waiting for. With Captain Britain, it was mainly Alan (Davis), but when he made Cobweb really, really ugly and really, really interesting and nice, I thought that was great. That Megan character - I must admit the latest ones that I've seen she is made a lot more attractive, and I think that's a shame. From my point of view, the more ugly, sympathetic people in comics the more that we can get away from this perfect ideal of blemishless, acne-free teens, the better.

CC: One of the things that makes Rogue so attractive is that she is physically beautiful, but you can't touch her. She's also the bad girl turned good. Louise (Simonson) used to say it's boys' revenge on their sisters for never letting them play with their Barbie Dolls, and there is some truth to it. I like the fact that Mary (Wilshire)'s drawing in the New Mutants now because she's bringing a different dynamic to the group. We have a scene in her first issue: we have the boys' locker room, the girls' locker room, we have Magneto's locker room. It's giving equal time. I want her perspective as a woman on how girls behave. I don't know what's it's like to be a fifteen year old girl, but I want to be able to create in those four girls characters that women readers can look at and say "I did that".

DID WORKING WITH FIRST LOUISE SIMONSON AND THEN ANN NOCENTI AS EDITOR HAVE ANY EFFECT ON YOUR APPROACH?

CC: Oh yeah, the other rum cliche is a good editor will get you through days of bad stories better than a good story will get you through days of bad editors. In comics especially the editor will kill you. I was far more traumatised when Louise gave her notice than when John left the book, because I knew I would find another artist but a good editor - Jesus! Harlan Ellison's been following his editor from corporation to corporation for ten years now with good reason. Steven King switched companies because his editor switched companies. He or she is your sounding board.

AM: I don't know whether this is just my own personal perspective, but I think women editors are the best. That is totally unsuported, totally off the wall but the women editors that I have worked with been the editors that I have enjoyed working with the most, and where there has been far less ego clashes. If you've got to men editors then no matter how rational or logical they are, there might just still be that bit of male competetive instinct with the editor thinking "Well, I've got to put this boy in his place" and the scripter thinking "Well, he's not going to do that to my stuff". But it's a different balance with Karen Berger, with Bernie Jay there is no competition at all, they just get it done.

CC: With comics, especially Marvel, because we're so intensely deadline concious I don't have time to write a story and put it away for a month and come back and read it. I'm working on a novella now that I finished last summer and I've put it away for two months and then picked it up and read it as an editor, with a degree of objectivity that I didn't have when I finished it. I can't do that with a script, I haven't got time. Ann is my objective, I find that when I'm pitching a plot, when I start telling her the plot aloud I can hear when it's a clunker.

AM: There's a moment when you suddenly start to tail off halfway through talking. You're saying "And then they... oh shit!"

CC: And she'd smile and say "Yep, you're right" and you think "Okay, back to the beginning"; but if you don't have that person to talk to and prod you in the right direction. Louise would say "Why dont you do this?" Her gift was to get you to do exactly what she wanted and to make you think it was your idea, and Ann is a chip of the old block. It's the questions they ask and the way you answer them that redefine a story, that give it a point, that focus it, that send you up in a totally different but equally satisfying direction. With a bad editor conversely, or an editor who just rubber stamps, an editor who is actively harmful or worse an editor who just does not give a shit, who justs censors the stuff, you're doomed; because if you come to depend on the sounding board and it goes away, you flounder. You don't have the time to be objective. By the time I have finished one X-Men I am already working on the next one. If I finish a script I am already two plots down the road, if I finish a plot I'm a script back if I'm doing an X-Men I'm thinking about the Mutants or vice versa, or the Dragon There is just too much going on to keep it straight. Another way to do it would be I suppose to have a collaborator like John Wagner and Alan Grant. I'm too egotistical.

AM: I couldn't work with a collaborator. I find that I end up doing it all anyway, because I think "That is nice, but I will just have to rewrite it to make the styles consistent".

CC: That's going to be my big challenge on the Benefit book.

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Moore and Claremont Speak Out On Writing

This 1985 interview with the unlikely pairing of Alan Moore and Chris Claremont comes from issue 54 of the British fanzine *Speakeasy*. The "intrepid reporters" are unnamed, but the editors of the 'zine are Cefn, Dick and Richard (apparently Cefn Ridout, Richard Ashford and Richard Hansom). The cover art is by Paul Johnson. The issue also contained three of Moore's *Maxwell the Magic Cat* strips which were later reprinted in *Maxwell the Magic Cat* Volume IV.

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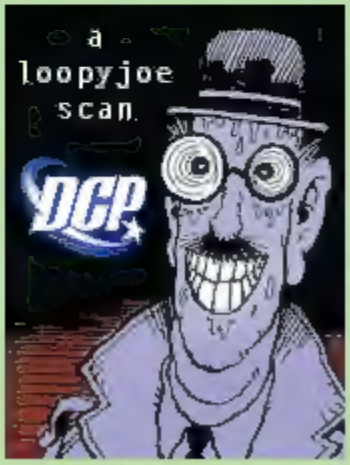
Moore and Claremont Speak Out On Writing (from Speakeasy 54) (1985) (loopyjoe-DCP).cbr



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